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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TBILISI 003177

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DEPARTMENT FOR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION GEARING UP FOR THE DAY AFTER GEORGIAN  
ELECTIONS

REF: TBILISI 3161

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: As the election campaign enters its final week and following a series of events that have strengthened former president Saakashvili's bid to win the January 5 presidential elections, it is increasingly clear that most opposition parties are planning not for victory on election day but for protests on the day after. Until his abrupt withdrawal from the race on December 27, Badri Patarkatsishvili's campaign was the starkest voice among this group. His campaign manager told us flatly that the election will be falsified and the Georgian people will respond. Others in the opposition have been less direct but essentially repeating the same line. Levan Gachechiladze, presidential candidate of the United National Council (UNC), a nine party coalition of opposition parties, said publicly on December 26 that the opposition will not allow former president Saakashvili to fulfill his intentions to falsify the elections and prevent people from defending their votes. Individual parties within the United Opposition, including former Defense Minister Okruashvili's Movement for United Georgia, the Conservative Party's Kukava, and Georgia's Way Zourabishvili are also claiming now that the election will not be free and fair. They are basing this assessment largely on complaints about harassment of voters and the voters' list. Two political parties are striking a more moderate tone that is not based on calling people to the streets after the elections. David Usupashvili's Republican Party (also part of the UNC) privately acknowledged a likely win by former President Saakashvili, with a view to focusing on the opposition's longtime goal of increasing its representation in Parliament. Similarly, David Gamkrelidze's New Rights' Party, which did not join UNC because, in a speech on the Parliament floor in November, he said he would not join in a plan to foment revolution again in Georgia, has been running on a campaign promoting "stability and predictability." We have consistently emphasized in every meeting the importance of reporting instances of concern to ODIHR and the Government's Task Force. We have also called on all the parties to respect the result of the election if ODIHR concludes they were free and fair. End summary.

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PATARKATSISHVILI'S CAMPAIGN: FOCUS ON THE DAY AFTER  
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¶2. (C) Prior to the Patarkatsishvili's sudden announcement on December 27 that he was withdrawing from the race, we spoke to his new campaign manager, Goga Zhvania, brother of the late Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania. (Note: MP Galbakhiani, Patarkatsishvili's former campaign manager, was replaced on December 25 following the December 24 and 25 release of videotapes that allegedly revealed a planned coup against government.) Despite the fact that Patarkatsishvili's

campaign still has no official party, his campaign was evidently awash in money. Unlike the headquarters of any other opposition party -- all of which are run down hovels in remote parts of town -- Patarkatsishvili's headquarters is located in an opulent building next to Patarkatsishvili's enormous residence in Tbilisi. With an interior full of marble, stained glass and oil paintings, it is a beehive of activity and has what appears to be plenty of staff and supplies.

13. (C) In a meeting with Poloff on December 26, Zhvania insisted that the Georgian election would be falsified and that the people of Georgia would decide how to respond. His deputy claimed that he knew exactly how the election will be falsified -- as he was on the Central Election Commission from 1992-2001 and knew how it was done -- but that this would remain "secret." (Note: In a separate meeting on December 24 with the Ambassador, Zhvania said that the National Movement would use the same technique his brother had used. End Note.) When asked whether it would be better to publicize known ways to falsify the results, Zhvania's deputy said the campaign would make public what they expect a few days before the elections in order to limit the time in which the Government could find an alternative way to falsify the results.

14. (C) Zhvania also expressed concerns about the voters' list and harassment of local representatives. Poloff encouraged Zhvania to submit these to ODIHR and the Government Task Force. He said that a formal complaint about alleged double listing of some 26,000 voters on the voters' list has languished at the CEC without response. Zhvania said that the campaign is now operating in an environment of "terror," as officials have been arrested and questioned around the

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country after the Government's release of the video and audio tapes. During the meeting, Zhvania's deputy took a call which he claimed reported on the arrest of a representative in Borjomi. When asked about the tapes, he said that MP Galbakhiani was a victim of a government sting operation.

15. (C) He assessed that the release of the tapes would have a negative impact on Patarkatsishvili's chances in the January 5 election. Poloff urged Zhvania to accept the results of the elections provided that ODIHR concluded it was free and fair. Zhvania responded that he knew the result of the ODIHR report would be positive and that the election would not be free and fair, no matter what the reports of international organizations or monitors. He doubted the neutrality of ODIHR assessments and said flatly that the response would be up to the Georgian people, not international observers or organizations.

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UNITED OPPOSITION: MANY ALSO FOCUSED ON JANUARY 6  
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16. (C) In a December 21 meeting with Poloff, Chair of Okruashvili's Movement for a United Georgia Tortladze, said that it was impossible for the elections to be free and fair as a result of the intimidation that is taking place in the pre-election period. He noted how his party's offices were closed by the Government in November, forcing it to take space in a dilapidated apartment in a hard-to-find part of town. He alleged that the intimidation is worse in the regions. Tortladze expressed similar concerns about the voters' lists which he contended had an additional one million voters. Poloff urged Tortladze to report to ODIHR and the Government Task Force any instances of concern. She also urged the party to accept the results of the election provided ODIHR assesses them to be free and fair. Tortladze responded that people would defend their votes if the elections are falsified.

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17. (C) In a December 26 meeting with DCM, Conservative Party Chair Kakha Kukava expressed doubts that the elections would be free and fair even if an ODIHR report may deem it to be so. He was skeptical of ODIHR reports, saying that each report has the same carefully worded findings regardless of election atmospherics. Kukava's main source of dissatisfaction was with the Central Election Commission's Chairman Levan Tarkhnishvili, citing him as an administration insider, and the make-up of the district and precinct electoral level commissions. Kukava voiced his frustration at the majority's failure to address the opposition's concerns, especially the inaccuracies of the voter's list, and the need to do away with the additional voters lists as a likely source of election day fraud. He said that the opposition had met with Acting President Burjanadze and despite her promises to address issues, there have been no answers forthcoming. He repeated several times that the U.S. should do an exit survey and mediate between the majority and opposition to bring resolution to the points yet unresolved. He discounted the authenticity of the recently released recordings of Badri Patarkatsishvili and alleged it was a stunt by the United National Movement to bring attention to Saakashvili's campaign. According to Kukava, the tapes solidify the United National Movement's claims that a "coup by dark forces" is imminent and strong measures for security are warranted.

18. (C) Kukava repeated that the opposition would organize protests on January 6 if the elections results were unfair. He said that any protests would be peaceful, just as they were November 2-6, until the government forcibly broke them up on November 7th. He asked how opposition members could remain calm when police are not punished for publicly and openly using excessive force. Still, Kukava said that Gachechiladze and the opposition should not be associated with Patarkatsishvili and any attempts to forcibly change the government through use of force.

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ZOURABISHVILI - THE SYSTEM IS ROTTEN  
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19. (C) In a December 27 meeting with the Ambassador, Georgia's Way Salome Zourabishvili and the Republicans' Tina Khidasheli said that conditions no longer exist to permit a free and fair election campaign in Georgia. According to them both, there was no freedom of media, no campaign funds

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available, and no possibility to have an election without intimidation. If before they had individual complaints about intimidation, now the entire system is flawed. Both political representatives were critical of the lack of media coverage of opposition candidates, saying that even when Imedi was on the air, the reporting was not as it was previous to its forced closure on November 7. Most of Zourabishvili's media complaints were linked to the television channels' disinterest in interviewing opposition candidates on substantive issues. She complained that the issues that opposition candidates are called to comment on are not about their platforms, but about statements made by other newsworthy figures. Zourabishvili said that the majority of the United National Movement's funding was coming from the country's budget and from pressure put on businessmen to donate. Despite Patarkatsishvili's comments otherwise, she said that the opposition has not received any funding from the wealthy businessman.

110. (C) Zourabishvili said that the recent release of tapes with Patarkatsishvili offering money to Georgian police official Kodua to enlist his support to foment unrest during the elections, was a result of collusion between Patarkatsishvili and Saakashvili to draw attention away from

the opposition candidates and to the United National Movement (UNM), thereby validating UNM's claims that coup attempts are real. Both Zourabishvili and Khidasheli raised concerns about CEC actions to allegedly open special PECs in Kodori for military voters and for police officers in Tbilisi. They allege that there are no military serving in Kodori, only Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) troops. With regards to special PECs for police on election day, they allege that police would vote for the UNM in the opposition stronghold precincts of Vake, Mtatsminda and Mtskheta, and vote again in their assigned precincts where they reside, thereby voting twice. Still, Zourabishvili said that the opposition is focusing not on January, but on winning the election on January 5. She discounted that other opposition members are planning otherwise.

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USUPASHVILI AND GAMKRELIDZE STRIKING A MORE MODERATE TONE  
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¶11. (C) In a December 21 meeting with Poloff, Chair of the Republican Party Dato Usupashvili (please protect) assessed privately that the best outcome for the January 5 presidential elections would be for former president Saakashvili to be elected and become a "better Saakashvili" as a result of the events of the fall. He stressed that he could not say this publicly but that the opposition's focus had never been to unseat Saakashvili now but to obtain more seats in Parliament to have an impact on the direction of the Government. Although the meeting had occurred before the December 24 and 25 release of video and audio tapes purporting to show an alleged coup plot by the Patarkatsishvili, Usupashvili expressed concern about Patarkatsishvili's impact on the elections. He worried, for example, how Patarkatsishvili's party is funding election officials throughout the country while United Opposition campaigners received nothing for their work.

¶12. (C) Separately, Usupashvili was disappointed that Acting President Burjanadze had not taken the opportunity to be neutral in the presidential race and had campaigned directly for former president Saakashvili. He said that there is widespread intimidation against opposition party activists, and cited an example of a campaigner in Telavi who lost his railroad job when his boss found out about his activities as representative of a wider effort being conducted by police and others nationwide. Poloff encouraged Usupashvili to raise the issue with ODIHR and the Government Task Force. He was frustrated that neither Acting President Burjanadze nor Minister of Internal Affairs Merabishvili had agreed to the opposition request to make a clear, public statement that any attempt at coercion or intimidation of voters would be investigated and prosecuted. Although he said the Government could not control every individual, he believed that such a public statement would make clear the Government's position and cut down on such incidents. He denied reports that the opposition was refusing to meet with the Government's Task Force but said that the opposition had not been informed of the last meeting.

¶13. (C) In a December 27 meeting with Poloff, political advisor for Davit Gamkrelidze's New Rights Party Shalva Pichkhadze assessed bluntly that Saakashvili would win by a landslide. He believed the UNC, with its sloppy attempt to bring out supporters to overthrow the Government in November, had handed Saakashvili a second term in office. Pichkhadze

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said bluntly that Georgia needs no more revolutions but that the other pro-Western parties were not a strong enough alternative to Saakashvili. They needed help to become stronger. He lamented that everyone from the opposition funds their campaigns from their personal resources. When asked about UNM, he told a story of a relative outside Tbilisi who relayed receiving pressure from an UNM official to contribute 100,000 GEL to UNM or "receive the financial

police tomorrow." Pichkhadze said his relative paid the money and still will vote for Saakashvili. He said that Georgians simply did not understand democracy - what it means to be free - and will choose a bad known for a potentially worse unknown. Still, he believed that the focus of the opposition should be on gaining enough seats in Parliament to better balance political power in Georgia.

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COMMENT  
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¶14. (C) For many in the opposition, all rationality has gone and the clear goal is revolution. As one observer noted, Georgia has only known revolution, and when the parties do not receive the results they want, it is to revolution that they turn. Some of the opposition concerns ring true, especially when they are reported across the country. We are particularly concerned with what appear to be credible reports of problems in the pre-election period which are giving an advantage to Saakashvili. We have and will continue to raise them with the Government. Still, Saakashvili was and remains a popular figure, especially in the regions. And Georgia needs to get beyond moving from revolution to revolution to become a stronger and more resilient democracy where election results are deemed fair and accepted by all parties. We will continue to support free and fair elections and press this message to all parties involved.

TEFFT